

Talent marks balanced Class A teams

State Basketball Tournament

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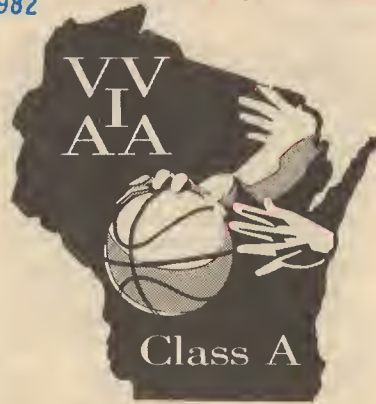
Milwaukee North's Robert Duckett, a rugged-looking 6-foot-4, 206-pound sophomore, and little Jarvis Ashley, a point-guard who averages 15 points a game and whose smile seems to light up the University of Wisconsin Field House, walked along the practice court Wednesday afternoon.

"Hey! Has Madison La Follette been out here yet? We want to see this super guy — Rick Olson," said Ashley. "Awh! They've already practiced. Olson's supposed to set a scoring record with his first state tournament basket. Well, we'll cut him down tomorrow. Coach is going to stay undefeated at state."

Duckett and Ashley reflect the strong confidence of the Milwaukee Area Conference Blue Devils, as they look for their second Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association state Class A boys' basketball championship in three years, and hope to keep alive a perfect 3-0 state tourney record for their popular coach, Garmer Currie.

The Blue Devils and other players may be sure of their respective teams' success, but for most unbiased observers the choice is up in the air.

Undefeated Stevens Point? Lightning-quick North? Or, maybe dead-



shooting La Follette? How about rangy South Milwaukee? Perhaps the winner of the Sheboygan South-Shawano game, or maybe dark horses like Brown Deer or Lake Geneva Badger?

If ever there was a state tournament without a Class A favorite, it's the 67th annual classic opening today at the Field House. Answer time won't come until Saturday night. Now it's question time, and every coach is hedging about a favorite in the 1982 version of March Madness.

Coaches don't like being "experts," because so-called experts are often wrong. So, there's a reason for reluc-

tance, though one thing is certain. They all look with envy at Class C Kohler and its prized player, 6-foot-10½ Joe Wolf with his 32-point average.

Stevens Point holds the only Class A perfect record at 22-0. Brown Deer lost just once and Shawano, with a marvelous basketball tradition, has just two losses — by one-point margins. It's a tournament with a "no-favorite" look.

The top-ranked Stevens Point Panthers drew most nominations — but only because of their record. Panther Coach John Schell, veteran state tournament basketball player with Cumberland in 1965, had a quick answer:

"You can't pick favorites down here. The fact that we're the only undefeated team doesn't mean a thing. We made it as a team, with no 'I' on it, and I'm proud — win or lose."

Predictions of a wide-open tournament are refreshingly new. This one, it seems, has top-drawer talent. That's why it's very attractive.

Some of those top-drawer Class A stars are Olson, Lake Geneva's Gary Ruch, Brown Deer's Derrick Rogers, Point's 6-7 Jay Laszewski and Todd Barnes, South Milwaukee's Joe Finn, Shawano's Greg Polzin, Sheboygan South's Keith Leonard and the hustling Ashley.

The predictions will start being tested at 1:05 p.m. today when Lake Geneva (19-3) opens against Brown Deer (21-1), and Madison La Follette (17-5) faces Milwaukee North (15-7) at 2:45. Tonight's session has Shawano (20-2) playing Sheboygan South (15-7) at 7:05 and South Milwaukee (19-3) against Stevens Point (22-0).

Brown Deer's Keith Peters, once a state Class C championship coach in Alaska, has led the Falcons to their first winning season in almost two decades. He offered two answers to the prediction question:

"Are you asking me who's the favorite or who I think will win? The favorite, by record, should be Stevens Point. But, you know I think the winner might come from the Sheboygan South-Shawano game. Shawano's good, with a great tradition, and South's record is deceiving. They're coming out of a league that probably was at its toughest in years."

Shawano's Norm Davis looks toward Milwaukee and Madison, and warns not to overlook South Milwaukee. "I always lean toward the two big cities with teams like North and La Follette," Davis said. "They're usually talented and scrappy. But, Stevens Point still has to be impressive."

La Follette's Pete Olson, whose Big

Eight Conference player of the year, Rick Olson, is averaging 28 points a game, agrees, in part, with Davis.

"In recent years, Milwaukee-area teams have been very good," Olson said. "Stevens Point's numbers are impressive, but all we're thinking about is North. If we shoot well, we could win it all."

"Stevens Point!" says South Milwaukee's Don Karnowski, with emphasis. The Rocket coach, however, admitted his choice is easy because his Milwaukee Suburban Conference team plays the Panthers first. "They have the record and the top ranking. We have a tough team and its success didn't surprise me, but we're concerned with Point."

Currie, however, is looking to the winner of the La Follette-North game.

"We're ready after beating ourselves in several games this year. If we can get by La Follette . . . Well, that's the game for us," he said.

Tradition has proven that few favored teams emerge as champions. Manitowoc fell two years ago, and La Crosse Central's once-beaten Raiders didn't live up to expectations in 1979. Last year, Milwaukee Madison, with five losses and a dark horse role, won it all before relinquishing the title later because of a player-eligibility

rule.

Despite that upset tradition, Sheboygan South's Bob Ryskoski, whose two sons, Keith and Scott, play for the Redmen, also leaned toward Point.

"We had a slow start, and our seven losses are deceiving," Ryskoski said. "We're playing best right now, but I guess you still have to go with Point."

Lake Geneva's Jerry Stelse was as undecided as any of his colleagues. Yet, he figures his Badgers have a chance, and if it should come down to free-throw shooting, 6-4 Gary Ruch and 6-3 Tim Schneider may give Stelse's team the edge. They hit 41 points between them in the sectional.

La Follette wouldn't trade its deadly shooting Olson for anyone at the line. The 6-1 senior guard is an 86 percent free-throw shooter. He and the Lancers will be the sentimental favorites in Madison after pulling out a pair of stunning last-second regional and sectional victories over Stoughton and Madison West.

"There are some dandies down here," said Lancer Coach Olson. "That's what makes it a state tournament."

So it all begins today — without a favorite, but with a lot of king-sized hopes.